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ABSTRACT

Since few debate tournaments can be administered successfully without employing some hired-judge pool, one of the fundamental ethical concerns facing the tournament director is the balance between filling all judge responsibilities and securing competent judges. The responsibility of securing competent judges can be met through a more extensive training program for each individual who will serve as a hired judge. A seminar conducted by the tournament director might include at the very least a discussion of the rules and, in the case of individual events, a review of each description. The specific ballot should be explained in detail, as well as the significance of each aspect. Rather than influence judges' personal judging philosophy, the fairest approach would be to present the major viewpoints held in each area and then recommend that each judge determine his or her own standards. Also, providing judges with an opportunity to watch host school competitors perform the various events, coupled with a generalized critique by the tournament director, should provide a clearer understanding of the activity. Extreme care must be taken to ensure that hired judges who are familiar with host school competitors are kept out of rounds involving these students. Finally, coaches should provide validation to all ballots, whether from hired judges or not, so that students are made aware that the worth of each opinion and comment rests in the content, not in the author. (HTH)

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ABSTRACT FOR
THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE
HIRED JUDGE POOL
BY
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Securing an adequate number of competent hired judges can pose major problems for forensics tournament directors. Most of the concerns center on the competency of judges who are not directly involved in forensics on a weekly (or even daily) basis. This paper investigates several questions associated with this concern.

Initially an effort is made to identify the specific criticisms that are directed toward hired judges, followed by an analysis of how such critical concerns may have developed. In response to these concerns suggestions are offered to aid directors in providing individuals who are better prepared to serve as judges.

Finally, the paper addresses a most critical question concerning the overall attitude toward "lay" judges.

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The Use and Abuse of The
Hired Judges Pool
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They have been called every name in the book from hired killer to professional squirrel. They are the subject of nightmares for serious competitors, they can be the scourge of a tournament director's life, and they are an essential element of almost every forensic tournament. The hired judge has been one of the more frequent topics of discussion during those long rides home after almost any forensic contest. Questions ranging from "What do I do about this evaluative comment?" to "How could he/she have made that decision about my performance?" to "Was the judge from this planet?" have bounced about the interiors of university vans for years. It does seem that the adjective "hired" when placed before the word "judge" causes a wide spectrum of attitudes, most of which are negative, from coaches and competitors alike. The intent of this paper is to explore both the reasons behind such attitudes and to discuss the ethical and educational impact of such beliefs. Upon preliminary investigation, the two primary areas to focus on should be the approach taken by tournament directors in using hired judges and the attitude coaches and students take toward the ballots received from hired judges. It might well be that the ultimate ethical question is found in this second concern.

As noted in the opening comments, few tournaments can be successfully administered without employing some hired judge pool. Particularly in individual events tournaments, guest schools often cannot supply an appropriate judging staff to meet their entry commitments. In both debate and individual events competition, the task of judge assignment is aided by an adequate pool of judges with no school alliances. Anyone who has scheduled a tournament is painfully aware of the fact that placing judges often takes as much time as setting the panels for competitors. In many instances, the depth of the hired judge pool will determine the difficulty or ease of the judge assignment process, as well as the weight of judging responsibility for

coaches attending the tournament. Realization of this fact of tournament management forces many tournament directors to scour the countryside for any and all persons who might be competent to serve as judges. As the tournament draws closer, the operational definition of competency may broaden considerably. A survey of Midwestern forensic directors recently suggested that tournament directors use between three and twenty hired judges at each tournament they administer. Such a demand can prove difficult to meet while still restricting the pool to only those persons well versed and experienced in the unique aspects of debate and individual events. When adding the variable that at many tournaments (especially individual events tournaments) a full-time hired judge may judge as many as nine preliminary and two elimination rounds (based on survey results), it is easy to see the impact the hired judge pool can have on each tournament.

One of the fundamental ethical concerns facing the tournament director is the balance between filling all judge responsibilities and securing individuals who will provide educationally and evaluatively sound judgements and comments. This concern has often been simplified to the competent judge vs. "warm body" dilemma. Again, based on the limited survey results, it appears that some concern exists that many hired judges fall into the "warm body" category. When asked to indicate concerns about hired judges, forensic coaches responded with comments such as "seemed inexperienced," "unfamiliar with rules," "made inappropriate comments," "didn't understand criteria," and "not respected by students." Given such comments and the weekly discussions the forensic community seems to have about hired judge's competency, it would seem that tournament administrators need to look more closely at the approach they take in securing, assigning, and, more importantly, training the hired judge pool.

It would seem that the primary responsibility to provide judges who will benefit the educational growth of the student competitor can best be met through a more extensive training program for each individual who will serve as a hired judge. When tournament directors were asked to explain the training that is given to po-

tential hired judges, the overwhelming response was, "A copy of the rules is provided." Judging a debate or individual event is a demanding activity, and it would seem that judges, especially those with little or no previous forensic experience, need to be armed with more than a set of rules and their own communication skills. A brief look at a typical scenario might suggest one of the reasons hired judge ballots are singled out as being weak or lacking credibility.

> On Saturday morning a hired judge arrives at the tab room to pick up his assignment. The tournament director, rushing to get rooms unlocked stops to give the assignment sheet to the judge. "What is CA?" the judge asks. As the director is about to explain, his student announces that two judges haven't shown up. With controlled frenzy the director says, "Oh, it's just a simple analysis of a rhetorical event. Judge it like a persuasive." With a pat on the back the director shoves the hired judge, who is the theatre director at the high school, off to judge his first communication analysis.

While the example may contain exaggeration for the sake of demonstration, the basic event is unfortunately repeated more often than tournament directors might like to admit. It is of little surprise that a hired judge may not provide the most educationally useful ballots.

Correcting this inadequacy is actually <u>theoretically</u> simple, although somewhat demanding for both the tournament director and the hired judge. Prior to the tournament, a judging seminar should be conducted by the director. The seminar should include at the very least a discussion of the rules and, in the case of individual events, a review of each description. The specific ballot which will be used should be explained in detail, indicating the significance of each aspect. It is interesting to note that when asked what were the problems hired judges caused tournament administrators, the number one response was "errors on the ballot."

After this information has been provided, another ethical question arise, namely, "How specific an explanation of judging criteria should be provided?" There is a legitimate concern over imposing or influencing judges with regard to personal judging philosophy. Questions of literary merit or significance of prima facia, for example, begin to edge into individualized judging standards which really should be left to the discretion of each judge. Yet some hired judges may

not be aware of the need to address such items. How far training should go in this area does present a dilemma for the tournament director. It would seem that the fairest approach would be to present the major viewpoints held on each area and then recommend that each judge determine his/her own standard. Providing representative ballots that host school competitors have received might prove helpful in this area.

One final suggestion concerning training is to provide the judge with the opportunity to watch host school competitors perform the various events. This, coupled with a generalized critique by the tournament director, should provide a clearer understanding of the activity.

Obviously such a training program places a time demand on potential judges, as well as on the already harried tournament director. However, given the ethical responsibility to the student, the demand does not seem unrealistic. Perhaps the demand could be softened by paying the hired judge the equivalent of the stipend for one round of judging for attending the session.

One last ethical concern exists for the director whose students compete at their own tournament. Extreme care must be taken to ensure that hired judges who are familiar with host school competitors are kept out of rounds involving these students. This fact should be obvious to each director. However, beyond this, care should be taken so that hired judges who appear "clean" (free from affiliation bias) are in reality able to judge any and all competitors. A director may think that a local judge couldn't know any of the host school competitors, but the reality of the situation might be different.

To this point, this paper has centered on the ethical concerns for the tournament director regarding hired judges. There are some observations that can be made about hired judges from a coach's viewpoint, and these might well touch upon some fundamental ethical concerns of the overall forensic activity. It is interesting that the title of this paper is "The Use and Abuse of Hired Judges." Often the

hired judge is not the abuser but the abused. As noted in the introductory comments, hired judges are often the object of outright scorn. Looking back at the survey comments concerning problems with hired judges, perhaps the most disturbing was that hired judges are "not respected by the students." It might be that coaches need to examine their approach to evaluating the decisions and comments received by hired judges. Based on discussions with coaches, it seems that all too often there is a tendency to dismiss the hired judge decision and/or comments if they seem to deviate from the norm. This is especially the case when a decision in debate or a ranking in an individual events round goes against the team or individual who "should" win based on previous performance. When a judge, hired or otherwise, is considered "wrong" in his/her comments, it seems that a very basic foundational concept of communication has been violated by the reviewer. The rankings and comments on a ballot reflect the opinion of a judge and as such should not (cannot) be subjected to challenges of correctness. An opinion is just that, a feeling or attitude; it may not reflect the norm, but that does not automatically dismiss it as being of little or no worth.

It might well be that the hired judge through his/her "deviant" ballots is exposing some potential problems with forensic competition. The cornerstone of forensics activity is to improve communication skills through healthy competition. Is it possible that debate and individual events have become so specialized that they have a set of communication rules that do not reflect "real world" communication standards? And if this is the case, should the forensics community be concerned over the implication of this? If a major goal of forensics is to better prepare student competitors for their roles in society, then it would seem that this would be reflected in standards readily apparent to all who observe forensic performances. Reaction to deviant rankings/decisions by hired judges may be signalling another ethical concern for forensic educators. Is it possible that the reputation of the competitor receives too much weight in the evaluative process by "regular judges?" Just as in professional baseball where the strike zone gets smaller for some super-

stars, do some forensic "heavy hitters" get an unfair advantage of the doubt too often? Judging should be based on the current performance, not overall track record. It just might be that the person who judges once a year and is seeing everyone for the first time is providing as realistic an assessment of the competition as is the veteran judge.

Given the possibilities just discussed, it would seem that coaches should, at the very least, provide validation to all ballots, whether from hired judges or not. It seems crucial that students be made aware that the worth of each opinion and comment rests in the content, not in the author. It might be useful for forensic directors to consider the subtle message that is sent when we find that hired judges deviate from the norm.

Tournament administration tests every resource a director has to call upon. Between making certain the schedule is error free and the morning donuts are fresh, there are a thousand and one items that demand the skill, attention, and confident calm that only a forensic director has. But added to the list of "to do's" should be a deliberate and well-thought-through training system for those who give their time and talent to serve as hired judges.

As coaches, it might be wise to give a little more openminded attention to those ballots signed "hired judge."